

**THE HONORABLE JEFFREY W. RUNGE, M.D.
ADMINISTRATOR
NATIONAL HIGHWAY TRAFFIC SAFETY ADMINISTRATION**

**Before the
SUBCOMMITTEE ON COMPETITION, FOREIGN COMMERCE,
AND INFRASTRUCTURE
COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION
UNITED STATES SENATE**

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Chairman Smith, Senator Dorgan, Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the Administration's proposal to reauthorize our highway safety programs in the "Safe, Accountable, Flexible and Efficient Transportation Equity Act of 2003" or "SAFETEA."

Through your leadership, and in conjunction with our State, local and private sector partners, NHTSA has worked to realize the goals of TEA-21. We are grateful to this Subcommittee for its continuing leadership by scheduling this hearing. My staff and I look forward to working with you and the rest of Congress in shaping the proposals that will reauthorize TEA-21. Working together, we will assure the successful reauthorization of this legislation and address the highway safety challenges facing the Nation.

Motor vehicle crashes are responsible for 95 percent of all transportation-related deaths and 99 percent of all transportation-related injuries. They are the leading cause of death for Americans ages 1 to 34. NHTSA's portion of SAFETEA focuses exclusively on highway safety. Although we are seeing improvements in vehicle crash worthiness and crash avoidance technologies, the rate and numbers of fatalities and injuries on our highways are staggering. In 2002, an estimated 42,850 people were killed in motor vehicle crashes, up slightly from 42,116 in 2001.

Traffic injuries in police-reported crashes decreased by 4 percent in 2002. While this is encouraging, we still are faced with the overwhelming fact that nearly 3 million people were injured in these crashes in 2002.

The economic costs associated with these crashes are unacceptable as well. In fact, they constitute a grave public health problem and serious fiscal burden for our Nation. The total annual economic cost to our economy of all motor vehicle crashes is an astonishing \$230.6 billion in 2000 dollars, or 2.3 percent of the U.S. gross domestic product. This translates into an average of \$820 for every person living in the United States. Included in this figure is \$81 billion in lost productivity, \$32.6 billion in medical expenses, and \$59 billion in property damage. The average cost for a critically injured survivor is estimated at \$1.1 million over a lifetime. As astounding as this figure is, it

does not even begin to reflect the physical and psychological suffering of the victims and their families.

The fatality rate for 100 million vehicle miles traveled (VMT) remained unchanged at 1.51, according to these estimates. Secretary Mineta has given us the goal of reducing the fatality rate to no more than 1.0 fatality for every 100 million VMT by 2008. This is not just a NHTSA goal; it is a goal of the entire Department of Transportation.

For these reasons, President Bush and Secretary Mineta have made reducing highway fatalities the number one priority for the Department and for the reauthorization of TEA-21.

Traffic safety constitutes a major public health problem, but unlike a number of the complex issues facing Washington today, we have some highly effective and simple remedies to combat highway death and injury.

Wearing safety belts is the number one offensive and defensive step all individuals can take to save their lives. Buckling belts is not a complex vaccine, doesn't have unwanted side effects and doesn't cost any money. It is simple, it works and it's lifesaving.

Safety belt use cuts the risk of death in a severe crash in half. Most passenger vehicle occupants killed in motor vehicle crashes continue to be totally unrestrained. If safety belt use were to increase from the national average of 75 percent to 90 percent -- an achievable goal -- nearly 4,000 lives would be saved each year. For every 1 percentage point increase in safety belt use -- that is 2.8 million more people "buckling up" -- we would save hundreds of lives, suffer significantly fewer injuries, and reduce economic costs by hundreds of millions of dollars a year.

In addition to the economic obligation, more importantly, we have a moral obligation to immediately address the problem of highway safety. The Bush Administration remains committed to reducing highway fatalities, and our bill offers proposals to increase safety belt use and to take those and other actions that can make the achievement of this goal possible.

Thanks in large part to the hard work of many of you and your predecessors, SAFETEA builds on the tremendous successes of the previous two pieces of surface transportation legislation. Both the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA), a bill with which the Secretary is proud to have played a role, and TEA-21, provided an excellent framework to tackle the surface transportation challenges that lie ahead.

ISTEA set forth a new vision for the implementation of the Nation's surface transportation programs. Among other things, ISTEA gave State and local officials unprecedented flexibility to advance their own goals for transportation capital investment. Instead of directing outcomes from Washington, DC, the Department shifted

more of its focus to giving State and local partners the necessary tools to solve their unique problems while still pursuing important national goals. SAFETEA not only maintains this fundamental ISTEA principle, it goes further by giving States and localities even more discretion in key program areas. To meet the significant highway safety challenges the States face, we have designed SAFETEA's highway safety title to create a safer, simpler and smarter program.

President Bush and this Administration are committed to fostering the safest, most secure national transportation system possible, even as we seek to enhance mobility, reduce congestion, and expand our economy. These are not incompatible goals. Indeed, it is essential that the Nation's transportation system be both safe and secure while making our economy both more efficient and productive.

While formulating the Department's reauthorization proposal, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and NHTSA came together on a different approach to addressing the Nation's substantial highway safety problems. Under that approach, States would receive more resources to address their own, unique transportation safety issues; would be strongly encouraged to increase their overall safety belt usage rates; and would be rewarded for performance with increased funds and greater flexibility to spend those funds on either infrastructure safety or behavioral safety programs. The following are the major programmatic elements of the Administration's highway safety reauthorization proposal.

SAFETEA establishes a new core highway safety infrastructure program, in place of the existing Surface Transportation Program safety set-aside. This new program, called the Highway Safety Improvement Program, will more than double funding over comparable TEA-21 levels. This new program would provide \$7.5 billion for safety projects over the 6-year authorization period. In addition to increased funding, States would be encouraged and assisted in their efforts to formulate comprehensive highway safety plans.

To streamline NHTSA's grant programs and make them more performance-based, we have proposed a major consolidation of NHTSA's Section 402 safety programs. While the basic formula grant program for Section 402 would provide \$1.05 billion over the 6-year authorization period, two important elements of this revised Section 402 are a General Performance Grant and a Safety Belt Performance Grant. The Safety Belt Performance Grant provides up to \$100 million each year to reward States for passing primary safety belt laws—meaning drivers and passengers can be cited for failure to wear a safety belt—or achieving 90 percent safety belt usage rates in their States. A State that enacts new primary belt laws will receive a grant equal to five times the amount of its current formula grant for highway safety. This significant incentive is intended to prompt State action needed to save lives. In 2002, States with primary safety belt laws averaged 80 percent use, 11 percentage points higher than those with secondary laws—laws preventing police from issuing a citation unless another traffic law was broken. States achieve high levels of belt use through primary safety belt laws, public education using

paid and earned media, and high visibility law enforcement programs, such as the *Click it or Ticket* campaign.

Any State that receives a Safety Belt Performance Grant for the enactment of a primary safety belt law is permitted to use up to 100 percent of those funds for infrastructure investments eligible under the Highway Safety Improvement Program in accordance with the State's comprehensive plan. Also, States can receive additional grants by improving their safety belt use rates. This incentive would provide \$182 million over the 6-year authorization period. Any State that receives a grant for improved safety belt usage rates or a General Performance Grant for the achievement of other key safety performance measures is permitted to use up to 50 percent of those funds for activities eligible under the new Highway Safety Improvement Program.

Overall, this groundbreaking proposal offers States more flexibility than they have ever had before in how they spend their Federal-aid safety dollars. It reduces State administrative burdens by consolidating multiple categorical grant programs into one. It would reward them for accomplishing easily measurable goals and encourage them to take the most effective steps to save lives. It is exactly the kind of proposal that is needed to more effectively address the tragic problem of highway fatalities.

The \$340 million, six-year General Performance Grant component of our revised Section 402 program not only eases the administrative burdens of the States but also rewards States with increased Federal funds for measurable improvements in their safety performance for reducing (i) overall motor vehicle fatalities, (ii) alcohol-related fatalities, and (iii) motorcycle, bicycle, and pedestrian crash fatalities.

SAFETEA is designed to help the States deter impaired driving. Encouraging people to wear their safety belts will help reduce the number of deaths and injuries attributed to impaired driving, but reducing the actual number of impaired drivers is a complex issue requiring interconnected strategies and programs. In 2002, an estimated 17,970 people died in alcohol-related crashes (42 percent of the total fatalities for the year), a 25 percent reduction from the 23,833 alcohol-related fatalities in 1988, but an increase of 3 percent over 2001. Intoxication rates have decreased for drivers of all age groups involved in fatal crashes over the past decade, with drivers 25 to 34 years old experiencing the greatest decrease, followed by drivers 16 to 20 years old. Our 2002 estimates indicate that impaired-related fatalities rose for the third straight year.

Additionally, the President's National Drug Control Strategy recognizes drug-impaired driving as both a problem and, in its reduction, an opportunity. As a problem, we believe that drug-impaired driving, either alone or in combination with alcohol, accounts for 10-20 percent of crash-involved drivers. Detecting drug-impaired driving gives police officers, prosecutors and judges the opportunity to appropriately sanction offenders and refer them to treatment as appropriate, which is an important objective of the President. NHTSA contributes to this Presidential objective principally through the drug evaluation and classification (DEC) program, which was recognized in the President's National Drug Control Strategy for the first time in 2003. By giving traffic

officers and prosecutors the tools to better identify drug use in vehicle drivers, the DEC program meets two important objectives of the administration: reducing traffic fatalities and injuries and reducing drug use. This reauthorization bill allows our agency to continue working towards these objectives by supporting this important program and reducing the incidence of both alcohol and drug-impaired driving.

Another component of our revised Section 402 program will focus significant resources on a small number of States with particularly severe impaired driving problems by creating a new \$50 million a year impaired driving discretionary grant program. The grant program will include support for up to 10 States with especially high alcohol fatality numbers or rates to conduct detailed reviews of their impaired driving systems by a team of outside experts and assist them in developing a strategic plan for improving programs, processes, and reducing impaired driving-related fatalities and injuries. Additional support will also be provided for training, technical assistance in the prosecution and adjudication of DWI cases, and to help licensing and criminal justice authorities close legal loopholes.

NHTSA believes that this targeted State grant program and supporting activities, together with continued nationwide use of high-visibility enforcement and paid and earned media campaigns, will lead to a resumption of the downward trend in alcohol-related fatalities that the Nation experienced over the past decade. Also, through the comprehensive safety planning process, all States may elect to use a significant amount of their FHWA Highway Safety Infrastructure funding, in addition to their consolidated Section 402 funds, for impaired driving.

In addition to the consolidation of our Section 402 programs, SAFETEA's highway safety title includes a key provision to provide a comprehensive national motor vehicle crash causation survey that will enable us to determine the factors responsible for the most frequent causes of crashes on the Nation's roads. This comprehensive survey would be funded at \$10 million a year out of the funds authorized for our highway safety research and development program. The last update of crash causation data was generated comprehensively in the 1970s. Vehicle design, traffic patterns, numbers and types of vehicles in use, on-board technologies and lifestyles have changed dramatically in the last 30 years. Old assumptions about the causes of crashes may no longer be valid. Since NHTSA depends on causation data to form the basis for its priorities, we must ensure that this data is current and accurate. Updating our crash causation data will allow us to target our efforts for the next decade on the factors that are the most frequent causes of crashes on American roads.

NHTSA has in place an infrastructure of investigation teams that will enable us to perform the crash causation study efficiently and accurately. These teams are currently performing a similar study for large, commercial truck crashes and are adept at gathering evidence from the scene, the hospital, and from victim and witness interviews. Their findings will guide the agency's programs in crash avoidance, including vehicle technologies as well as human factors.

SAFETEA also creates a new \$300 million incentive grant program that builds upon a TEA-21 program to encourage States to improve their traffic records data. Deficiencies in such data negatively impact national databases including the Fatality Analysis Reporting System, General Estimates System, National Driver Register (NDR), Highway Safety Information System, and Commercial Driver License Information System as well as State data used to identify local safety problems. Improvements are needed for police reports, emergency medical services (EMS), driver licensing, vehicle registration, and citation/court data provide essential information. Accurate State traffic safety data are critical to identifying local safety issues, applying focused safety countermeasures, and evaluating the effectiveness of countermeasures.

SAFETEA also establishes a new \$60 million State formula grant program to support EMS systems development, 911 systems nationwide, and a Federal Interagency Committee on EMS to strengthen intergovernmental coordination of EMS. The States would administer the grant program through their State EMS offices and coordinate it with their highway safety offices.

For the past 20 years, Federal support for EMS has been both scarce and uncoordinated. As a result, the capacity of this critical public service has seen little growth and support for EMS has been spread among a number of agencies throughout the Federal government, including NHTSA. Most of the support offered by these agencies has focused only on specific system functions, rather than on overall system capacity, and has been inconsistent and ineffectively coordinated.

In 2001, the General Accounting Office cited in its report, "Emergency Medical Response: Reported Needs Are Wide-Ranging, With Lack of Data A Growing Concern," the need to increase coordination among Federal agencies as they address the needs of regional, State, or local EMS systems. According to GAO, these needs, including personnel, training, equipment, and more emergency personnel in the field, vary between urban and rural communities.

The Administration believes that Federal support for EMS and 9-1-1 systems should be enhanced and coordinated. The enactment of this section would result in comprehensive system support for EMS, 9-1-1 systems, and improved emergency response capacity nationwide.

SAFETEA also would provide \$559.5 million for NHTSA's highway safety research and development program. This program supports State highway safety behavioral programs and activities by developing and demonstrating innovative safety countermeasures, and by collecting and disseminating essential data on highway safety. The results of our Section 403 research provide the scientific basis for highway safety programs that States and local communities can tailor to their own needs, ensuring that precious tax dollars are spent only on programs that are effective. The States are encouraged to use the successful programs for their ongoing safety programs and activities.

Highway safety behavioral research focuses on human factors that influence driver and pedestrian behavior and on environmental conditions affecting safety. The program addresses a wide range of safety problems through various programs, initiatives, and demonstrations, such as: impaired driving programs, including the drug evaluation and classification program, safety belt and child safety seat programs and related enforcement mobilizations, pedestrian, bicycle, and motorcycle safety initiatives and related law enforcement strategies, enforcement and justice services, speed management, aggressive driving countermeasures, EMS, fatigue and inattention countermeasures, and data collection and analysis efforts. All of these efforts have produced a variety of scientifically sound data and results.

SAFETEA provides specific set-asides out of Section 403 funds for the National Motor Vehicle Crash Causation Survey, discussed earlier, and for EMS and international highway safety activities.

Finally, SAFETEA would provide \$23.6 million for the NDR. The NDR facilitates the exchange of driver licensing information on problem drivers among the States and various Federal agencies to aid in making decisions concerning driver licensing, driver improvement, and driver employment and transportation safety.

Mr. Chairman, NHTSA's portion of SAFETEA builds upon the principles, values, and achievements of ISTEA and TEA-21, yet recognizes that there are new challenges to address. We urge Congress to reauthorize the highway safety programs before they expire on September 30, 2003. I would be pleased to answer any questions.